

Malenkov and the H-Bomb

The Alsops Look for Motive Behind Russia's Switch on Atomic Energy

By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

WASHINGTON.

"MALENKOV knows that he can't win a war with the United States now. He could hurt us, but we'd clobber him, and in the end we'd win, and that would be the end of him. But he also knows that in a few years he'll have what it takes to knock us out. So he wants to be sure that there's no big war in the meantime."

This is the simple explanation of the current Soviet switch in tactics which has been offered by one astute official. It may be right or it may be wrong. But it at least serves to emphasize a point which badly needs emphasizing. A Korean truce, however desirable in itself, will not end the growing threat to the survival of the United States.

The nature of this threat was summed up in the final report by the experts recruited for Project Lincoln. These experts solemnly warned that the Soviets, in two years' time or a little more, will have atomic capabilities sufficient to cripple this country. This is one reason why Andrei Y. Vishinsky's surprise move last Wednesday, when he called for renewed discussions of disarmament and atomic energy control, has been received in some quarters with almost as much interest as the Korean truce move itself.

For the first time, Vishinsky failed to call for immediate "prohibition" of atomic weapons, and an immediate one-third reduction in great power armaments. These two demands, repeated tirelessly by Vishinsky for years, amounted to a request to the Western powers to sign their own death warrants.

Their sudden omission may have no significance at all, although Soviet spokesmen in the United Nations took pains to put it about that this was a portentous new departure. At any rate, the Vishinsky move does at least suggest that the new Soviet regime might just conceivably, for the first time, be in a mood to talk seriously about atomic energy control.

FOR its part, the American government has been in process of carefully re-thinking American atomic policy. The re-thinking has been done by a distinguished five-man panel, headed by the great physicist, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer. Other members of the panel were Dr. Vannevar Bush and Dr. Joseph E. Johnson, both of the Carnegie Institute; Dr. John S. Dickey, of Dartmouth College, and Allen Dulles, of the Central Intelligence Agency.

These five men worked together on the problem of atomic control and the new weapons from April, 1952, until just before the inauguration, when they handed in their final report to the White House and the State Department. The report is highly secret, and its conclusions are not known. But it is known that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles read the report carefully and passed it on with detailed comments to President Eisenhower.

It is also known why the five-man group was recruited in the first place. As early as January, 1950, when President Truman announced his intention to go ahead with work on the hydrogen bomb, physicists and others who knew what this decision really entailed, were already urging a "new, new look" at the problem of controlling the terrible new forces.

FOR a long time, the old tendency to shove the whole unpleasant problem under the rug prevailed. But by the spring of 1952, it became known that the test of the world's first true hydrogen bomb was imminent, and the problem could not be kept under the rug. Therefore, the five-man Oppenheimer board was recruited, and asked to consider anew this country's policy on the new weapon.

The first hydrogen explosion, last November, lent special urgency to this task. Even the technicians were dismayed by the destructive force of the new device, and also by certain other special characteristics.

This all-too-successful test, in fact, altered the nature of the world situation, for it opened up the possibility of total devastation of an entire nation. Indeed, for reasons already explained in this space, it opened up the distant possibility of the destruction of the human race.

In short, the problem which the Oppenheimer group considered is, to put it mildly, a serious one. But it is serious for the Soviets as well as for the United States. The Soviets will test their own hydrogen bomb one day—within two years is the best intelligence guess. But the United States will, presumably, at least make certain that if there is to be total devastation in a new war, the destruction will be mutual.

IT WAS originally intended to put forward a new American proposal for controlling both atomic and hydrogen weapons at the time of the first hydrogen test last November. This was not done perhaps simply because the Oppenheimer panel found the problem so hideously difficult.

One apparently insurmountable difficulty is that there can be no real control of the new weapons without untrammelled international inspection. Most Russian experts believe that no Soviet regime can accept free inspection, because of the very nature of the closed Soviet system.

But if a Korean truce is in fact negotiated, the time may be ripe to discover if the Malenkov regime is capable of serious discussion about the new weapons, so that we shall at least know where we stand.

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The Alsop column also appears in the Herald Tribune, Monday